

“I CELEBRATE
MYSELF
AND SING
MYSELF AND WHAT I
YOU SHALL ASSUME
FOR EVERY ATOM
BELONGING TO ME
AS GOOD BELONGS
TO YOU”

SONG
OF
THE
WATERS



ARGUS 2013

MYSELF OF QNOS

ARGUS 2013

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DESIGN EDITOR
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EDITORIAL STAFF
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FACULTY ADVISOR
Dr. Julie Kane

FROM THE EDITORS



Kaysee Carrere

Editor-in-Chief

It has been such a pleasure working on Argus this year. It has definitely been a challenge, but the reward has been great! I want to take some time to talk about what Argus means to me. Even before becoming Editor-in-Chief, I knew that Argus was about genuine unbridled self-expression. I wanted to design a magazine that reflected that. I wanted to give student writers and artists on campus an opportunity to help make Argus a reflection of their creative spirits. This is why we chose to theme the issue after Whitman's poem, "Song of Myself." Argus is meant to be a song of ourselves as a student body.

Serving as the Editor-in-Chief of Argus has been one of the most rewarding leadership opportunities I have ever experienced. Taking on this role has opened so many doors for me in the professional world, and I have faced many hardships during my term that I know I have learned from and will carry with me into my future. That being said, I would like to thank Dr. Julie Kane for her constant support throughout my editorship and for recommending that I apply for the job in the first place.

Last but certainly not least, I want to extend my thanks to my amazing staff. I'm so happy that we made such a great team. We all worked so hard to bring our goals for the magazine to fruition, and it has paid off. Thanks for helping to make editing Argus such a fun adventure!

Catherine Beverly

Assistant Editor

Working on the Argus for the 2012-2013 school year has been inspiring. Not only have I had the wonderful experience of working with some of these talented ladies, I've learned a lot about the spirit of the Northwestern students. From quirky stories about love and friendship to slam poetry about a lonely road, I've discovered so much about NSU's literary finesse.

As much as I have enjoyed the editing process, there was nothing more touching than being honored with 1st place in the fiction division of the magazine. The ability of the Argus to be used as a tool for recognizing the talented poets, artists, and writers of this school should not be overlooked.

For this reason, I hope that next year brings the Argus more wonderful contributions from the student population. It is easy to become an onlooker in the world of literature and to let your talents remain unrecognized, but there should be no fear in sharing your ideas.

One day, people will look back and be able to know the sorrows and joys of this small town, all because the students took the time to transfer their imagination onto a blank page.

Caitlin Pearce

Design Editor

I have been the Argus' Design Editor for the past three years, and each year has been a wonderful experience. This year's team was such a great pleasure to work with because of their hard work and enthusiasm for the magazine. They had a clear direction with where they wanted the magazine to go, and helped me work through the design process to produce a great solid piece.

This year's theme centered around being true to yourself and expressing that through art. The staff came up with a way to express this through the words of a poem by Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself." The Editor-in-Chief had already expressed to me that she wanted the design to feature heavy typography more than imagery, and so having the poem incorporated into the magazine helped to guide my design process.

I am thankful to all the members of the staff for making this year working on Argus my favorite. This is my last year that I will be the Design Editor for the magazine, and I hope my successor will have as much fun and good experience working on the Argus as I did.

Kristen Hadley

Staff Editor

This year's Argus theme is "Song of Myself," inspired by Walt Whitman's poem of the same name. In the poem, Whitman celebrates nature, life, death, and most importantly, himself. At Argus, we have encouraged our readers and contributors to do the same.

In this book you will find imaginative fiction, passionate poetry, fascinating nonfiction, and beautiful art. It is amazing to know that students here at NSU contributed all of this work—there are so many viewpoints and lives represented in this year's magazine and on this campus. I am very proud to go to such a diverse school where people willingly share their stories and creative talents.

The work our fellow students are doing is truly inspired and worth taking the time to appreciate. I would encourage you to take a moment, or many moments, to enjoy the creative work contained in this book. You will not regret it.

THE JUDGES

POETRY
Thomas Parrie

FICTION
Dr. Andrew Crank

NON-FICTION
Michelle Pichon

ART/PHOTOGRAPHY
Michael Yankowski
& Leslie Gruesbeck

WINNERS



FICTION:

1ST: Learning How to Swim by Catherine Beverly

2ND: Post-Op by Michael Easterly

3RD: Sister Winter by Kristen Hadley

POETRY:

1ST: Inheritance by Elizabeth King

2ND: Reloading by Kristen Hadley

3RD: It's Funny What We Choose to Remember
by Randa Lopez

WINNERS CONT.

NON-FICTION:

1ST OVERALL: Screened by Betsy Loyed

PHOTOGRAPHY:

1ST: Belladonna by Annabel Jones

2ND: Dancing Bones by Derrick Notice

3RD: Through the Woods by Annabel Jones

FINE ART:

1ST: Personal Cerberus by Ethan McManus

2ND: Funny Face by Annabel Jones

3RD: Lounge about Leighanna by Ethan McManus

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IS YOU
TALKING
JUST AS MUCH AS
MYSELF,
I ACT...

AS THE TONGUE
OF YOU,**TIED**
IN YOUR MOUTH,
IN MINE IT**BEGINS**
TO BE**LOOSEN'D.**

POETRY

INHERITANCE



By: Elizabeth King
1ST PLACE

Life lives on after death
My father's sister's auntie
Left me with her aftermath and imagery
And the image is ME
I am the modern SHE
And WE fall for men like HIM
My mother's son's grandfather
Who bathes in tubs of GIN
And I'm so far from HIM but
The blood line seeps IN
With lips to uphold a promiscuous GRIN
That I borrowed from
My auntie's daughter's uncle
Who would never take a SIP
But would be strung out
If Crown Royal was a KISS to
My grandmother's daughter's father's
FIST, who would get a KICK
Out of breaking the fidelity code
With an image to uphold picture THIS
With RIPS in the family portrait
My brother's father's mother
Took sips of a strong brown to ignore it
Her pussy was an endorsement
Signed, sealed, and delivered to

My mother's brother's father
Who somehow left the stamp off every light bill
He felt BRIGHTER in the dark
And somehow EVERCLEAR became a temporary blur
For a sweet lady who embraced her Southern Comfort
To bear with her employment
To feed her babies
And my brother's mother
Is one and the same
Who births the seed to carry
Her remains including the shame that
My mother's brother's sister's mother
Felt as she watched her husband
Drown his soul in TOXIC
Rubbing the bible in her right POCKET
Place her life on the line to STOP IT!
My grandmother's daughter's son's sister
Embraced the bottle from youth
Inherited more than her hair and
My brother's mother's ex-husband's
Nose flare
From liquids love she embraced his absence
But even Jack Daniels MAGIC
Couldn't make the pain disappear from
My uncle's sister's mother
As she bled from LOVE TAPS
From her husband's nightmares and RECAPS
And my father's mother's RELAPSE
That caused her heart to attack

Now I'm BACK

This is how my relatives and I related

And I sip Ciroc to make me stronger

Feast on it as an anti-depressant to cure that hunger

My eyes seek an imitation spouse and

I replay my grandmother's easy way out

I drink to feel NUMB

So I feel NONE

I've fully chosen the poison that gives me HAPPY feelings

Like my mommy used to sing

As she softly lands from her broken wings

And I'm chirping the same song

From picking the same CHUMP

Searching for love young

She educated me the same DUMB

But it saved me to be scripted

I promised I listened

to what simon said

Prevention from giving head

As if brain is free

It costs to be ME

And to rest in peace

I blind the sheep and

Use some Henn to SLEEP

I've disgraced my sheets

Imitating my father's creep

As if GOD couldn't blatantly SEE

My brother's grandfather's GIN, grandma's PRAYER,

daughter's CROWN, husband's HOES, and his mother's JACK

and her husband's FAILURE branded my SKIN
somehow it seeped in
forcing me to carry this chain
stuck to the branches of this family tree
of this dysfunctional family
which caused me to malfunction
using an anti-doped to cope
I destruct me HAPPILY
To build a smile on a BROKEN face from a sober MISTAKE
Take sips for a small dip of peace
A stress RELEASE
To kick up the pacing feet
I have my reasons
Like grandpa who was always GRIEVING
Grandma who was always NEEDING
Mom who was always thinking about LEAVING
I thank God for grandma who always believed
Even if faith never did redeem HIM
Life has twice the vice but can lead to virtue
After you fail you can still live life abundantly
And this is life lived from
My grandmother's husband's daughter's
Son's father's sister's father's wife
Who allowed me to live TWICE
And the world was passed to ME.

RELOADING

By: Kristen Hadley

2ND PLACE

he used to taste like sweat and salt and cigarettes but now it's
only dirt and gunpowder in his mouth and teeth and it rages
beneath his skin like an animal—the fear that what was
over there (he always calls it 'over there') is here and
i can taste it on his tongue, sour like vomit and tobacco, and i
can feel it in the twitch of his finger aching for a
trigger and—

i can't hear it the way he does, the way it rings in his
ears and his chest and how it sends a shock through
him and he's in the bathroom telling me that it's
all fine, it's all okay and maybe it is but maybe it
isn't okay, and i wonder more and more if when he
came back from the bombs and the blood they came
with him and maybe what he left were pieces of
himself in the sand

IT'S FUNNY WHAT WE CHOOSE TO REMEMBER

By: Randa Lopez

3RD PLACE

“That’s my girl.”

I smiled when I read it,
three simple words
strung together to mean so much.

He is drunk Gandhi.

That Bukowski poem expressing my thoughts of the hour
touched both of us,
extending its hand through miles
to join us.

He is drunk Buddha.

I miss him
way more than I care to admit.

I miss his alcoholic infused speeches,
the Jameson and cigarettes, his Jesus hair.

He’s not Jesus—He doesn’t want to save anyone.

I miss his car, his fractured hand,
and the wisdom I would gain from listening to him.

“No one in the world is good enough for you,”
he would tell me between sips of his whisky.

“Whoever ends up catching you (sip)
is going to be one lucky son of a bitch.”

He never tried, he is broken,
but he still built up my confidence.

He broke down my walls.

“You’re too good for whomever he is.”

I would laugh and call him a liar

and say that he didn’t know shit.

He would look up at me with those

soul piercing eyes

and ask me to make him another drink.

This time, I would pour him a gin and tonic

and he would sip it and say,

“That’s my girl.”

I AM

By: Kaysee Carerre

I Am the one who formed you in the womb.

No longer am I dead; I have escaped my tomb.

I Am the shepherd who calls when my sheep are lost.

Do not fear, my dear, for I have paid the cost.

I breathed the stars into existence and cried the seas that fill the earth.

Nothing in the world could measure what you're worth.

I Am the healer of your soul and the keeper of your heart.

Despite how far you sometimes feel, we never are apart.

I held you in my arms before you were ever born.

I hungered for your love the very day the veil was torn.

I come in many forms; I've walked upon the dirt.

Sometimes I come in wrath, or I come to heal the hurt.

Just let it be known that I'm willing to forgive.

All you have to do is take me in your heart and live.

THE DESIRE TO AWE



By: Betsy Loyed

I want to write something epic.

Something powerful
that leaps from the page
into the mind and lodges there.

I want to write something
so strong
that it reaches and takes hold
of people and remains in their heads.

I want to write something meaningful.

I long to turn these pages
into a work of art rendered only in
words.

JUST DON'T LET THE CHILDREN SEE YOU CRY

By: Rikia Ancar

They say after you've taken the plunge
and hit pitfalls wrapped in a gold band
they send you off in pelted rice
to fists, flares, and hot grits.

Don't let the children see you cry.
No one is there to shield virgin ears,
soothe absences—they die of excitement each time.
Cyclic, without warning, resurgent
passion, burning from a cigarette,
ashes scattering hope, sprinkling despair.
Run cool water on the circular singe,
find the little diamond that won you and
march on—the others will say, through whispers.

Don't let the children see you cry.
Paint their lives Disney blue, conceal the black.
Study the Michelangelos of wifely-sainthood.
Be the Mona Lisa of pristine duty.
Hush that whining and fix that man a plate
Nana says, perpetually 1920s.

Just don't let the children see you cry—
Dashing enchantment of the giant
who stomps in, doling out affection,
patching wounds to keep the United Front.
As doors creak closed, bedtime prayers released

choices unveiled: intimacy as Raggedy Ann,
dumping ground for atrocities against Black Men.

He won't make my girls cry, molding into
punching bags, mats on the back porch
for an alluring, charcoal man.

No marching orders to make my son tyrannical,
blistering knuckles, bellowing throat, stomping
out the worth of a woman—squeeze into a glass
gulp down at breakfast, parched for more.

Tonight, the children will partake in tears
your eye too plump, blackened
throat quivering in hushed silence.
The bag you packed last week.
The children—one asleep, two dripping
onto nightgowns—escaping in murky night.

Lord have mercy, they saw me cry.
Witnessed my strife, iniquity—
lurking, shaded in night too afraid.
Too alienated to walk out with raised noses.
We drove in our night cottons and chiffons,
took the old Ford past familiar places
of oppression, hushed cries, hot grits.

I let them see me cry, this one time,
so I wouldn't be the villain who
tarnished precious Daddy, left to rust.
I hurt too long, waited too long, died once too many.

VINTAGE



By: Kristen Hadley

she is up to her elbows in soapsuds when he kisses her on the mouth and works his fingers into the knot at her neck. she says, “i stopped doing the housework in heels, it’s not 1950.”

she curls her dirty toes against the tile floor and leaves a long red lipstick streak across his cheek, a glasgow smile. her hands are wet against the small of his back; his hands are hot against the hollow of her shoulder blade. “i can put them back on,” she says, “if you want me to,” but her elbows are in the soapsuds again and he’s laughing about the dishes and the way her mascara runs when they touch and touch and touch.

HOW TO FEEL

By: Betsy Loyed

Everyone thinks that my
drinking is funny,
that I am also amused by my own

drunk

personality, that I'm just a young
kid playing like everyone else.

What they don't realize

is

that this is my genuine escape.
I can do anything, be anything,
I have the power to be

the

person I want to be without fear
of mocking or rejection or stress.
This condition is my

only

catalyst other than negative feelings
or actions, other than drugs or other
enabling items that give me my

real

excuse to be my happy, unworried,
true and complete self.
Vodka, tequila, and whiskey—my

way

to start the sprint that relieves me
of my burdens, of my obligations
of the things that people expect that

I

can't fulfill, that I can't bear to
shoulder any longer. To
these people, how I

feel

doesn't mean a damn thing.
I am just a pawn in their chess
game, a piece that doesn't mean

anything.

A DENTIST CREATED THE ELECTRIC CHAIR

By: Elizabeth King

Place me in your arms
I'm locked down
Mouth clogged
Shhh...
No more sound
Held captive
For spitting out my cavities
You mimic me
Punish me
For my word vomit
Said to be making you sick
I'm not surprised
You'll never shock me
Just shake me until I'm numb
Erase my thoughts
My last sentence is a memory
Needles stick into my gums
And say, "Feel this"
The realness
I let your poison enter me
Little narrow mirror self
Invaded into my throat
Whispers, "Picture this"
Then tell me I have toxic spit
While the clock on the left watched and kept time

He didn't lay a hand on me
Strapped begging the drill to stop drilling me
If he wasn't feeling me
He went on telling me this
In this investigation,
I need to put more hesitation
On my imagination
The other tools stood watching
They squeaked for me
Silence their little tears to weep for me
Place me under this white sheet
Blood dripping from my teeth
After riding the hot seat
I shall speak
No more
Took my silent exit
Persecuted for something I thought was free
Who knew?
Freedom of speech
Would be the death of me

DOOM

By: Betsy Loyed

I started to lose me when I decided to seek joy in common things.
I should have known it would do nothing but lead to untraceable
Steps of neverminds and nothing-yets to soon lead me to nothing left
But sad eyes and deep breaths from common lies and irrelevant regrets.
I have become a subject over tea—how could I have the audacity to
desecrate me?

COMPUTER, CONSTRUCTION, AND CARDSTOCK

By: Randa Lopez

there is something so simple, so freeing,
so exhilarating
about a new clean sheet of paper
it has so much potential
and is so essential
to the monumental things in life:
our birth dates, finger paints, first dates,
“do you like me? yes or no?”
grades, diplomas, insurance,
weddings, divorces, and toe tags
it is declarations of war, love, independence, and thesis
it is the carrier of religion and the holder of truths and ideals
a new sheet of paper can be anything it wants to be
it is malleable and mobile
paper is planes, cranes, and snowflakes
it is stories and adventures recorded and unimagined
paper is you and me and every other living thing
paper is man's best friend and keeper of history
it is crowns and news
champions against stains and lipstick prints with phone numbers
poetry about life and love written on menus
paper is the battlegrounds for communication
paper, humanity's catalyst for creation

CHAPTERS



By: Kristen Hadley

i like the noises you make when you read—

little mumbles, like the story is too much and

threatening to burst from the pages

and swallow you up—but

you're not scared, i think,

it's rather that you're surprised

that something someone else made could

steal you, and you'd go

willingly,

smiling

SYMPHONY

By: Kaysee Carerre

If ever I have tasted a sweeter melody

If ever I have heard a song sung for eternity

If ever I have felt the pressure of the strings

pressing against my fingertips and giving my heart wings

If ever I have felt this chill upon my skin

If ever I have heard the pounding of the heart within

If ever I have voiced the words upon my lips

that tell of all my secrets and tear down all my bricks

Then tell me when I've heard resonant timpani

and been enchanted by the music of this symphony

PANSEY BATT^S



By: Randa Lopez

Momma told me,

“The only way to get the smell out is air, rainwater, and time.”

It’s been years, but I still remember it—

Straight vodka, smoked cigarettes, and Bengay.

How it clung to you, followed you, enticed you,

Led you hand and foot down the mind’s dark alleyways,

Promised you half-truths that it would be all better,

That it would go away

After that one last glass.

I remember being terrified at hearing you cry at night,

Cursing lost loves and confiding in a young girl

Who didn’t know what to do but listen to your drunken outbursts.

I can still smell you in the places I’m advised not to visit.

I can taste you in my drink and I can feel your disapproval after all this
time.

You may be gone, but the ghost of your smell lingers,

Vodka, stale cigarettes, and warnings:

“Don’t waste your life, girl. You’re only got one.”

DREAMLAND

By: Patrick Key

Do people become seers in the dreamland?

Floating nowhere, perceiving, deceiving?

Dreams of willing mates are never too bland.

I greet them with a hello, believing

That their real life stares are invitations.

Caution shackled, chained in the far reaches...

That sharp gaze proves sleepy revelations!

I actually don my clean, crisp breeches.

Contemplate shaving, but why would I change?

If it is scruff they want, scruff they shall get.

My foretold approaches, not acting strange.

Will the dream and the substantial duet?

No. They are either married or “hiding.”

So...you cannot blame a guy for trying.

THE TIGHTENING



By: Patrick Key

Electro-pop's pulsing.

Lecture's wafting, hitting the walls.

Stopping. Starting. Now it's randy.

Now it's repetitive,

Becoming quite the sedative.

Heads falling.

Bodies shifting.

Pens scribbling.

The pulse comes back.

I SWEAR
I WILL NEVER
MENTION LOVE
OR DEATH INSIDE A
HOUSE,
AND I SWEAR...

I WILL NEVER
TRANSLATE MYSELF
AT ONLY ^{TO} ~~ALL~~, ~~ONLY~~
OR HER WHO
PRIVATELY STAYS
WITH ME ~~OPEN~~
IN THE ~~OPEN~~
AIR.

FICTION

LEARNING HOW TO SWIM



By: Catherine Beverly
1ST PLACE

I am standing in front of the ocean for the first time and memories flood my head. Forgotten scenes ebb and flow with the weight of the waves, as if I'm watching someone else's movie. My feet are firmly planted in the sand. It acts like cement, binding me to the earth while I wish I could float away. I stand there, silent and unmoving in a cascade of thought, and one sentence stays with me.

I've always wanted to learn how to swim.

It all started when I was a kid. We had a huge pond in the back and my mom always caught me staring at it through the window. The waters were brown and thick with sludge, but the reflection of the midday sun enthralled me. Animals scampered up to the edge to drink. In the fall, deer and stray dogs joined the menagerie. A fellowship of differences, connected by one common necessity: water.

One day, as I watched the pond, I craved to join the animals. I scrambled off the window seat and ran to the study. My mother reclined on the settee, the stem of an empty wineglass suspended between her fingers. I tiptoed closer, trying not to startle her, and I knelt next to her and tapped a finger on her shoulder. She shuddered awake, blinking her eyes in rapid succession.

“What is it?” she asked. Her voice was raspy from sleep and cigarettes; the sound stays with me even now.

“Teach me to swim, momma?”

She let out a snort of laughter. “That pond is disgusting. You’d catch some disease in there! You shouldn’t even go anywhere near it,” she said. She sat up and stumbled off of the couch, leaving me with a pat on the head before she went to refill her glass.

That day, my mother may not have taught me how to swim, but she did teach me something else. She taught me to be afraid of things I didn't understand. She taught me not to take a chance.

I've always wanted to learn how to swim.

We enter this world in water, but so many people spend their lives avoiding it. So many people like my mother, like me. I never got to swim in that pond. Two years after my plea, my mother and I moved into the city and we never saw it again. Despite the fear I feel now, I take a step forward in honor of the daring child from my memories. The tide breaks on my extended foot, the water sliding over it. The sand dances around my toes before the water slips away. As the ocean retreats, another memory fills the void.

I've always wanted to learn how to swim.

I was in fifth grade the second time I had the chance to swim. A schoolmate was celebrating her 12th birthday at the community pool and her parents made her invite everyone to the party. I waited anxiously in my room, clutching my brand new swim goggles. I thought that day would change everything. I was right.

My mother drove me to the pool, but it seemed as though the car was crawling along and we would never get there. When she finally pulled up to the new community center, I couldn't contain my glee. Without waiting for a goodbye, I darted from the car. I covered the distance between the parking lot and the entrance gate in a few seconds, too excited to even notice the burn of concrete on my bare feet.

The water was crisp and cool, nothing like my pond. The only animals congregated here were my schoolmates. The adults greeted me, taking my mom's gift for the birthday girl. I ignored the children calling me in favor of staring at the rush of the Whirlpool. Who knew there were so many different kinds of water? Fast and slow, blue and brown. I crept up to the side of the pool, too

nervous to step in.

“It’s pretty, right?” a girl said from behind me. I turned just as she came to stand next to me. “My papa’s scared of water, but I think it’s pretty.”

“Me too!” I smiled. I finally found someone who thought the water was as wonderful as I did! “My mom doesn’t like swimming either.”

We became good friends in those few minutes by the pool. I told her about the animals at my pond and she told me about the seagulls she saw when she drove into the city with her dad.

There were whispers just before it happened. A girl flew out of nowhere, two hands stretched in front of her. All I remember is a thump and my new friend’s wide eyes as she fell headfirst into the pool. The water overtook her and she sank straight to the bottom. Laughter sounded for a moment, but it was hollow. It faded when she didn’t come back up.

I’ve always wanted to learn how to swim.

She had blue eyes, just like that pool. That’s what I remember the most about her. That, and her name: Molly. It turns out that was her first week at our school. The cool tendrils of water caress my foot again and I’m almost too scared to continue. My other foot rises and falters, but I continue for Molly. She always wanted to learn how to swim, but no one ever taught her. With both feet on the ground, I realize I stand at the precipice. Water sloshes around me and loose tendrils tempt me forward. Gently they say, trying not to frighten me: Just a step at a time.

I’ve always wanted to learn how to swim.

A step off of a cliff and a swan dive, a figure twirling through the air to reach the flat surface of the pool. The water parted and licked up her body as she was submerged. The water rushed around her, yet she was a Nereid flitting through them. Meaningless words and numbers echoed in the natatorium over the sparse applause of the crowd. The swimmer hoisted herself out of the pool and

bowed her head as she returned to her coach's side. Somewhere it was decided that flips and twirls were more important than a love of the water.

A different woman was given a medal that day, a woman with flat eyes and a sneer. The swimmer was abandoned at the pool, forgotten in her sorrow. A foot twirled on the surface of the water like that of an aquatic ballerina. Her coach absentmindedly patted her back before leaving with the crowd.

"You were really good," I said from across the room. Her head shot up and her foot punctured the water. "Diving, I mean. It was really good."

"Uh, thanks, but I really didn't do that well. I got fifth."

"Doesn't matter. You were the best in the water." It was the truth. The other girls may have shown their skill in acrobatics, but the pool was only a landing space for them.

"You obviously don't dive," she laughed. "The water doesn't matter as much as you would think."

"I don't know how to swim," I said. It was an absentminded remark, but it echoed off of the ceramic tiles, accusing me. Her raised eyebrows only emphasized my failure.

"For real? That's crazy!"

"Uh, yeah. I just never learned. It's no big—"

"Let me teach you!" she said, hopping up from her seat on the tiles.
"It's super easy. Just get in!"

Fear froze me where I stood. It was what I'd wanted since I was a child, but I couldn't bring myself to say yes. Her enthusiasm faded as the silence continued.

Workers entered the natatorium to clean and our bubble was broken.

I've always wanted to learn how to swim.

The swimmer from that day was from a competing school. I didn't see her again. I haven't told anyone about not knowing how to swim ever since. Now I'm almost 30, too old to ask someone to teach me. Out of the corner of my eye I see

my friends relaxing in the sand. They're too busy to notice me or the water. I take another step for the swimmer that day, the first person who offered to teach me to swim, and another for myself. Too late to stop now, the water is already chilling my calves. In and out, the water tugging at my feet and coaxing me forward. It's easier now, the ocean offering to take the weight from my body.

The tide is up to my knees and I've never felt anything so strong, yet so gentle. The tugging grows harder and my feet are growing numb from the cold. I take another step and the water swirls beneath my foot, tickling the sole. Another step and the water is lapping at my waist, moving me with the rhythm of the sea. Over my shoulder I see my friends as smudges on the white sand. They avoid the ocean. Still, they do not see me. My attention turns back to the horizon where the sun drifts from the sky and slides into the ocean with me. Finally up to my chest, the water is stronger than before, trying to lift me from the seafloor. I freeze, suddenly unsure.

Come with us, the waves whisper playfully. We'll teach you to swim. I take a chance and fall back, letting the water support my body. For the first time in my life, all of the weight is lifted from me and I am free. The ocean cradles me, rocking me gently in its curving arms. I stay suspended for what seems like hours and tendrils of water drift over me, lovingly at first. My legs, my stomach. Eventually, water creeps across my throat and into my ears. I panic, unsure of myself off solid ground. My feet fall through the water, but now the movement is more like pushing than floating. I drift further, never reaching the floor. My head floats just above the water. The ocean no longer cradles me; it closes around my throat and pulls at my legs. I claw at the surface, hoping to find some purchase, but the water slips through my fingers, as ephemeral as it has always been.

I try to scream, but water rushes into my mouth, exploring me as I had longed to explore it, and I sound foreign and muffled. Trickles of the sea's laughter flow into my ears and nose. I can no longer see, salt and frost searing my

eyes. I am like the animals I once watched, scratching and clawing at the water surrounding me. Fighting to stay on top. The sunlight is blotted out by the waves. They no longer caress me—they crush me, pushing me deeper and farther.

I am ripped from the ocean's grasp, my head shoved through the belly of the ocean and into the sky. Hands yank at me, but I keep fighting. Words again, different than before, telling me to stop kicking. Telling me everything will be alright. I open my eyes to burning air and burning light. Water spurts from my mouth and nose, mixing with my tears and falling back into the ocean. The salt in my throat stops me from crying as I'm borne to the sand by faceless friends. My knees hit the beach first and a hand pounds my back, giving me the chance to take a breath. My fingers clench the sandy earth to steady myself. I welcome the weight of my body, a concrete proof of life. I am substantial again, no longer seeping with water and floating in darkness. The sun shines on my back and the hands of my friends rub warmth back into my arms and legs before I am swaddled in a beach towel.

A cacophony of voices surrounds me. They ask me if I'm okay, if I need help, if I can breathe. Yes, I want to answer, but the words are stuck in my heart. *Yes!*

I push myself off of the ground and onto my feet, my legs shaking from use, but I am still held by the friends around me. The sea doesn't look playful anymore; it looks as vast and deep as eternity. It is a place of unknown things. I'm led away from the ocean and I realize that today isn't the day I didn't learn how to swim. Today is the day I learned how to stand.

POST-OP

By: Michael Easterly

2ND PLACE

The hospital hallway smelled like rubbing alcohol with occasional whiffs of bile from the open rooms. Marcus shambled along beside me as we passed the nurses' station. His I.V. stand doubled as a gliding walking stick. Marcus was a year older than me, but he looked a few decades older. His poor health and the recent surgery had taken its toll.

A pretty young woman frowned at Marcus as we passed her in the hallway. A second or so later I heard her squeak. I smiled and Marcus chuckled. Marcus wore only a hospital gown. It was loosely tied in the back. I suggested that he should wear some underwear or shorts, but he wanted to be comfortable.

I looked at Marcus, "You're going to blind someone if you keep this up."

His laugh turned into a wheeze. "It'll teach these young'uns about the pitfalls of too much curiosity."

We turned right when we reached the end of the hall. The halls formed a giant square on this higher floor. Keep turning right and you would come right back to your room. Other than Marcus's coughing fit, the rest of the circle was walked in silence. Marcus was getting tired, and I wasn't in much better shape myself. I was not sick, but I was getting old too and just about any activity wore me out.

After we reached Marcus's room, he climbed into bed. A nurse came in and reconnected all the wires and monitors. It was an uncomfortable sight; it reminded me too much of what I probably had in store down the road. Marcus stared at the ceiling as the nurse left.

"I need to ask you for a favor, Danny," Marcus said after a moment.

I frowned and waited for him to continue, but he remained silent. "Okay,"

I said. I wasn't sure what he was waiting for.

"I don't want to spend Christmas in this hospital bed. I need you to get me out of here. I want to spend it at my son's house and eat some goddamned turkey, not this hospital cafeteria shit."

I was silent for a moment. I didn't think it was a good idea for him to be out of the hospital yet. He was just a few days out of surgery. "Aren't they coming up here tomorrow? Why do you need me?"

"Yeah, they're coming tomorrow to visit for a bit, but then they're driving back. They won't check me out. They think I'm still too weak. Spent most of the last year in and out of here and I can't stand it anymore."

"That's a lot of trouble just for some turkey."

"That's not the point, and you know it. This may be the last chance for Christmas with them that I got. Get me out of here Christmas morning and I'll catch them by surprise for lunch. They won't bring me back until after."

I sat quietly for a few moments. It wasn't a good idea, but that had never held Marcus back before. When we were in Germany in '63, Marcus started a fight with three guys before the rest of us knew what was happening. He took a beating before we pulled the guys off and sent them running. It had been over a girl that wasn't even interested in him.

I glanced at my watch. It was getting late, and I needed a drink to warm me up a bit. I stood and grabbed my coat and fedora. I stepped toward the door then stopped. "I'll see what I can do." I left.

The air was cold, and snow still remained on the ground from the storm yesterday. It was always too cold here in the winter. I had never worn a hat until I moved here. I didn't have enough hair to be walking around in this chill. Of course, I also didn't have enough hair to walk around in the summer sun either.

I drove home and got in a little after eight o'clock. The kids, Luke and

Briana, were already in their pajamas. They were watching some animated movie. I shut the door quietly. Luke turned and bounded up from his prone position in front of the television.

“Hey, Papaw!” he said as he hugged my leg.

I patted him on the shoulder and said, “Alright, get on back to your movie. I’m going to bed.”

Luke sprinted and flopped down back in front of the television next to Briana. Briana had barely stirred. I turned and walked down the hallway. Jessica popped out of her bedroom. She was putting her brown hair up into a ponytail. “Hey, Dad, will you watch the kids tomorrow? I got to go into the office tomorrow and take care of a few things before Christmas. It will just be for a few hours.”

“Fine,” I said, “By the way, I may be gone a few hours after the kids open their presents. I’ll be back in time for dinner.”

Jessica crossed her arms and said, “You’re not going to be here on Christmas?

I sighed, “It has to be Christmas and I’ll only be gone while the kids are playing with their new toys. They won’t even notice I’m gone.”

She shook her head. “Reminds me of my childhood. Wouldn’t be a Christmas without you being somewhere else.” She walked past me and said, “Dinner starts at six. Try and be there.”

I grumbled and went into my room. I poured a glass of bourbon and settled into my recliner. I turned on my small television and found a bowl game on. I dozed off sometime after finishing my drink.

I woke up on Christmas Eve achy and groggy from sleeping in the recliner all night. Sometime between Briana’s screaming after Luke tore the head off her Barbie and making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to hold them off until dinner, I decided that I was going to bust Marcus out. I shouldn’t be the only guy

to suffer through his family on Christmas. It would serve him right.

Christmas morning came early. I awoke to the sound of screaming--both kids this time. I dragged myself into the living room where the children were jumping around. Jessica handed me a mug of coffee. "Alright, both of you pick one present and open it," she said.

The rest of the morning continued like this. I received two ties and a chess set with a leather board that rolled up. "So you can play with your friends anywhere, Papaw," Briana said.

The present opening was finished before seven in the morning. The kids ran off to their room with the spoils. I dressed and grabbed an extra pair of clothes for Marcus. Jessica was cleaning the mess in the living room when I left. "I'll be back in a few hours."

"Yep," she said.

A light snow was falling, and the morning air had a bite to it. I concocted a plan while slowly driving down the icy streets to the hospital. I tried to imagine all of the angles, but I didn't know enough about how hospitals worked. How often did the nurses check in? Would we have to sign out? I had no idea.

I arrived at the hospital and tried to gather information as I entered. A receptionist sat behind a tall counter. A closed gift shop was off to the right. There wasn't a security guard anywhere in sight. A slight tingle started at the ends of my fingers and moved up my hands. Stepping into the empty elevator, I pushed the button for the ninth floor.

As the elevator rose, the nervousness faded away. I had lived through more intense situations than this. This was nothing. Still, anything like this had a tendency to rile me up. It sharpened my wits.

The elevator dinged and the doors opened at the ninth floor. I saw a supply closet down the hall. The nurse's station was around the corner so this closet was perfect. I opened the door and flipped on the light. It contained a bunch of

cleaning gear. I put the clothes on a shelf then turned off the light.

I walked around the corner to Marcus's room. Marcus was still asleep, so I turned on the light and shook him awake. His eyes snapped open, and he tensed before he realized it was me.

"Get up, Marcus, we're getting you out of here."

Marcus smiled and threw off his covers. He began pulling off the monitors and cords. A nurse entered before he had finished, "Mr. Robinson, what are you doing?"

"Oh, sorry, my friend here stopped by to surprise me for Christmas, and I thought I'd take my walk right now," Marcus said.

The nurse flashed a tired smile. "Fine, but let me help you out."

The nurse quickly removed the cords and left. I helped Marcus onto his feet. He straightened and tried to maintain a good posture as he took his first few steps. "So what's the plan?"

"The plan is simple. I stowed some clothes in a closet around the corner, and you're going to change. Then we are going to walk out of here like we are visitors. Just make sure that wristband is completely covered the whole time and don't look sickly."

"I think I can do that. Let's get to it." He grabbed a small towel on the way out and handed it to me, "I might bleed a bit when I pull this I.V. out."

We walked down the hall and past the nurses' station. The nurse at the desk did not even look up as we passed by. We reached the supply closet, and I looked around while Marcus slipped in with his I.V. stand. I heard him fumble around for a few moments. I assumed he pulled out his I.V. when I heard him bite off a curse.

He opened the door and looked down the hall both ways. "I am bleeding a good bit. Let me have your coat so I can hide the towel."

I took off my coat and handed it to him. He arranged the towel so that

the shirt pressed it onto his hand, and he put the coat on over it. It hid the towel pretty well. "Alright, bud, we need to get out of here. Already taking too long," I said.

Marcus straightened and walked as smoothly as possible. He did a fair job of it. He relaxed and leaned against the wall in the elevator. He was breathing heavily.

"You going to make it? We can still go back," I said.

He smiled. "No, I'm fine. The blood is getting to me, but I'll make it to the car."

The elevator doors opened on the ground floor, and we walked to the exit. The halls were quiet, not many people were here on Christmas day. Marcus walked at a leisurely pace, but he was trying to hide his heavy breathing. We were halfway across the lobby when Marcus swayed. I reacted just in time to catch him as he collapsed. I wasn't able to hold him up, just awkwardly lower him to the ground. Blood dripped down his hand, and his eyes fluttered. The receptionist jumped up and grabbed the phone.

Marcus's eyes focused. Tears welled up in his eyes, and he stared at the ceiling—avoiding my eyes. "I guess I'm stuck here after all, Danny. Get out of here before the nurses show up. I'll be fine."

"The jig's already up. I'll stay here until you're taken care of."

"No, you have a family, you should go be with them. No reason to be stuck here getting in trouble. At least one of us can be home for Christmas. Go."

I patted Marcus's shoulder then stood up. A nurse was running down the hall toward us. I left as quickly as I was able. The air outside was freezing without a coat. I reached my car without being accosted. I sat for a few moments to gather myself. I wiped some wetness from my cheek. If I hurried home, I would have the whole afternoon and evening with the kids. Probably would be better than a lonely hospital bed. I turned the key and drove home.

SISTER WINTER

By: Kristen Hadley

3RD PLACE

There was a time when his eyes weren't rimmed with red and he was plain and simple. He was thin and long and fragile like he might break. When he was close to breaking, you had a way of scooping him up into your hands and keeping him together.

Now it's cold December, and he is gone. At night you sometimes wonder where he is and scroll through the numbers in your phone, pausing on his and just looking, looking, looking. When you feel particularly daring, you click the number and wait for it to ring once, then jab your thumb against the 'end call' button until the call cuts off. Sometimes you want him to answer. He never does.

You recall the time in the cabin when the air conditioner was broken and you were together in the upper room, sticky under layers of quilts and sheets and legs and skin. In the mornings you could smell Sarah cooking pancakes downstairs and you'd kiss, lazy like syrup and melting snow, and there were no questions. There was just the cabin and the quilts and fingers tracing tattoos. It seemed like it might last forever.

They were always whispering about the two of you—whispers about what was happening, whispers about progress and change and fucking and breaking and crying and drugs and sobriety and leaving. Whispers, whispers, whispers. Everything was whispers, from the first night you had drinks together to the summer you spent together in the cabin.

He called you *Jess* on a Tuesday in New York, drunk and tired and sad for no reason. You remember the exact way he said it—soft like a song or something from a book, around the mouth of an empty plastic cup.

He said, “Jess, I just feel like shit all the time,” and you remember thinking he looked like he was stuck in a different decade, like he’d been put together all wrong, ragged around the edges. You remember calling him *spaceman* and laughing and saying, “No no no no! It’s just work. You’re worn out. We’re all worn out. Just get some sleep. Just go to sleep,” and laughing and laughing.

“No,” he said, “I. Feel. Like. Shit.”

His eyes were empty and you didn’t laugh anymore, and then the cup was on the ground and he was right there and his face was hot and he was so thin and small and there. “I feel like shit, and I always feel like shit, and it’s not working. Jess, it’s me.” There was nothing to say.

“Jess. Jess. Jess. Jess. Jess.” There were snowflakes melting into your hair and he was shaking and whispering *Jess* until it didn’t sound like a word anymore.

“It’s snowing, Jess. It’s snowing, it’s snowing!”

“I know.”

“Spaceman, look it’s snowing, it’s snowing, it’s snowing!”

And you were there but you weren’t. It was just the snow and the space between.

“Fuck you.”

He walked away, and you were there in the snow. For a while, things were sort of okay. The two of you were masters of pretending that everything was okay, though the whispers of conflict roared up again. Whisper, whisper, whisper of fights and snowstorms and empty beds.

You distinctly remember the first time you kissed again after that—it was different from other kisses, which had a way of drifting and dragging. This one was rough and harsh on his part, more desperate and hungry. There was a kind of yearning, a begging to be held and touched and loved.

Something about it was almost painful in its desperation, in its searching, pleading feeling. It ached like a new wound.

“Jesus fucking Christ! Will you just hold me?” His hands were tugging at your collar and his lips were bruised and red. “Jesus! Will you just do something? God!”

But you didn’t do anything because it felt different, like it wasn’t him, really. Or maybe you were the one who had changed. You couldn’t tell for certain. There was a chill in the air and his hands were tightening around your collar again and he was murmuring “Just do something. Just do something,” and shaking.

You pushed him away. “No. I can’t. I don’t. I can’t.”

Somewhere, maybe he is remembering this too—the feel of his fingertips on your wool coat, the taste of your mouth like whiskey and smoke. Maybe he is remembering how much it hurt. You like to think that he remembers the hurt as well as you. It wasn’t intentional, really, but it felt strange and wrong when nothing had been said since that night in New York in the snow. It would have been wrong.

A few weeks later, when the frost was beginning to melt off the trees in colder parts of the country, the whispers rose up again: cocaine... girls... sex on couches... bloody noses. You remember the sight of him, jittery, giggling, red-eyed. “Spaceman, what the fuck are you doing? What the fuck! What the fuck! What the fuck!”

“It’s fun,” he said, “Jess, come on. Jess. Jess,” stammering through lines of powder and sweat and women. “Just one. Come on, Jess.”

“No! No! No! No!” repeated over and over, shaking, pushing the girls away and the mirror to the floor and the powder flying up in a cloud. “What the fuck! Come on.”

“Jesus fucking Christ, Jess!” until the words weren’t words and they

were just noise and his hands were balled into fists and he was falling, falling, bruising your skin, screaming. And the girls were gone and it was just you and him and the powder on the carpet and the tears that wouldn't come and space.

You hated him for so long after that. It was all broken now and there were more than just whispers.

“We can’t do this anymore.”

You stare at his number in your cell phone. It’s been years since it all happened, and you’re still doing okay, relatively. You wonder if he and Sarah still talk. You wonder and wonder and wonder. Sometimes your imagination gets the best of you. More than anything, you want him to hurt the same way you did when you first realized that things were changing. You want him to hurt.

You wonder if somewhere, across the city or state or country or somewhere, he can feel a dull sting in the bottom of his stomach, a sort of throbbing pain that hasn’t gone away since the night in late June when you and he decided things had to change. It didn’t make sense and yet it felt necessary after the powder on the floor and the wool coats and the snow. He had been drifting for some time and it was inevitable, really, or at least that’s what you’ve told yourself.

Before he started drifting, when everything seemed permanent and real and unchanging, you kissed in one of the bathrooms at a bar in Chicago, pressed against the wall and drunk, so drunk, sweating and tired but endlessly happy.

“I hate that stupid drunk voice you do,” you said, fingers on his neck, lips on his lips, words swallowed up and held in his lungs like smoke or air or life or something, and he was falling.

You remember it feeling like dancing, moving to the street, to the

train, to his apartment, locking the door, to the couch, to hands and hips and fumbling, fingers under fabric and inches of skin, the way everything was orange, yellow, red, green paint swirling in dirty water, and there were flowers at the corners of your eyes and clouds and color. How you felt alive and electric underneath shaking hands and button-up shirts, and how you were gone somewhere far where there were no questions or complications or hesitations and there was just this, frantic and frenzied and real, and you could hold it and feel it and fall.

He smelled like sweat and smoke and sandalwood and music from the next room was leaking through the wall. He was there, there, everywhere and nowhere, but mostly just there and you couldn't hold on, no matter how hard you tried.

That all seems so long ago now and you wonder if he realizes it's his own fault and there's music drifting in from the apartment next door and you are trying to maintain something like composure. You are remembering springs and summers and autumns and winters, the worst winters—bloody nose and blow winters—and your fingers are twisted in a quilt stolen from the cabin that smells like sandalwood and sweat. And on the table, your phone is ringing.

THE LAST NOTE

By: Kaysee Carrere

The steady beeps of the heart monitor filled the hospital room as Ellise slowly regained consciousness. Her eyes fluttered open and captured at first only darkness, and then slowly colors and light enhanced into a clear picture. Confused and unable to speak, Ellise gently squeezed the unfamiliar hand that was wrapped around hers. A young man with dark short hair and piercing blue eyes lifted his head from the bedside and looked at her. A smile broke through his tired cracked lips and his eyes flooded with tears.

“Ellise, it’s me, John. Do you remember me? I’m your fiancé.”

Terror and confusion consumed Ellise as she struggled to understand. She shook her head from side to side to answer his question.

John turned away and covered his face to hide his disappointment. The pain in his voice was almost unbearable as he spoke. “Ellise, you were in an accident. You lost control of the car and hit a tree. During the accident, you hit your head and lost consciousness. You’ve been in a coma ever since. It’s been eleven months.” John then pushed the call button on the bed, and doctors and nurses rushed in.

Ellise winced as the doctor pointed a bright flashlight at her eyes. She obeyed when the doctor asked her to follow his index finger with her eyes and to catch a tiny stress ball that he threw to her.

“Her vital signs and motor skills seem to be intact. Nurses, order a CT scan, so we can get a look on the inside,” demanded Dr. Dennings.

After two months of tests, scans, and physical therapy, Ellise regained her speech and was released from the hospital into the care of her fiancé. It

was a long drive from St. Mary's Hospital in Houston to their small cabin in Taylor, Texas. She walked into the foreign house and began to scan the room for some glimmer of hope—a picture on the wall, a scent, anything to trigger a memory, but nothing captured her attention. Even the warmth of John's arms around her waist and his soft kiss on her cheek made her feel uneasy and violated rather than comforted. Ellise sighed deeply. "I'm not ready for this yet. I'm so sorry, but right now you're just a stranger to me, John." John released her from his embrace, and Ellise roamed the house. She made herself comfortable in a small room with glossy white walls, a baby grand piano, and a cello standing in an open hard case propped against the wall.

She glided her hand across the steel strings and the elegant wood. Ellise sat down in the nearby chair and stared at the sheet music on the stand in front of her. She grabbed the instrument and the bow from its large case, tightened the hairs, and applied rosin to the bow. She positioned the cello between her legs and released the tiny silver stick on the bottom until it touched the floor. Ellise glided the bow gently across the strings and pressed firmly as her fingertips danced along the neck of the cello. She smiled in disbelief as she played through a sonata solo. Just as the last note echoed throughout the house, John entered the room clapping and wearing an ecstatic smile.

"Ellise, you remember."

"I don't remember learning or playing it ever before, but it was instinctual, like breathing. I didn't think about it. I just played."

"You're a professional cellist. I wasn't sure if you would be ready to work again so soon, but you proved me wrong. The Houston Symphony Orchestra has a concert planned later this month. I will call them and let them know that you're available."

Ellise continued to play into early morning. She had found a friend in a world of strangers and a place to call home in an unfamiliar house.

The months flew by and Ellise kept busy with work and with getting to know her fiancé. She tried diligently to rekindle the flame that once burned between herself and John, but despite their persistent efforts, she could not see him as anything more than a friend. It felt like trying to light a match in a rainstorm. If the rain would just stop, the match could light. “What is standing in the way of my memories? What is the rain in my life?” Ellise pondered as she let the shower’s warm water caress her skin. Before going to sleep that night, she prayed for the rain to stop. For an epiphany, a sign—anything. “God, I’m tossing away the match now. I’m just going to wait for the sun. I don’t know what else to do.”

The next morning Ellise awoke and dressed to perform at a matinee concert out of town.

As he looped his tie John asked, “Remember anything yet?” “Nothing yet,” Ellise replied with a disheartened sigh. She rushed around the house collecting her music, cello, purse, keys, and breakfast. Before leaving, she ran to John and pressed her lips against his for a second, then pulled away surprised.

John laughed, “Apparently you remember more than you thought.”

Ellise blushed and reached for the doorknob.

“Have a great day—honey,” John joked.

Ellise giggled and darted out.

Over the next few weeks Ellise began to warm up to John. Their goodbye kiss in the morning became ritual, and they began holding hands in public. His arms wrapped around her waist no longer felt unwelcome, but rather, wanted. They snuggled on the couch as the living room television drowned out the sound of the hard rain outside. Ellise pulled

herself from John's cozy chest to answer the phone.

“Hello.”

“Ellise Hayes? This is Edward Richards calling on behalf of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.”

“This is she. It's a pleasure to hear from you, Sir.”

“Three weeks ago I sent you a formal invitation to perform as our guest soloist at our fall concert at Lincoln Center. Your fiancé replied declining our offer, but I'm calling to convince you to reconsider.”

“I never received the invitation, Mr. Richards, but I would be absolutely honored to perform if I'm available. When do you need me to arrive in the city?”

“We need you here two weeks prior to the concert for rehearsals. That's a week from today,” said Mr. Richards.

“I'll be there,” replied Ellise.

“Goodbye, Ms. Hayes.”

“Goodbye.”

Ellise ran into the home office and rifled through John's desk drawer. She snatched the letter from its hiding place and stormed into the living room. She threw the letter at John. “Why did you hide this from me?” she said angrily.

“You don't understand,” he pleaded. “It's just, it seemed like you were finally beginning to fall in love with me again. The last place I wanted you was in New York City, away from me.”

“So you lied! Let's get one thing straight, John. Maybe I'm starting to feel things for you, but I am not in love with you!”

The next week Ellise packed her things and left without a word. Although she was hurt, Ellise could not fight the thoughts of John that plagued her mind all day: in the morning, in rehearsals, and even in her

dreams. She could not stay mad at him. Though she didn't remember their past, something convinced her that it was too special to throw away.

The night of the performance arrived and Ellise gracefully crossed the stage to her chair. Her fingertips once again danced across the strings. As each note faded, she thought about how each section of the song resembled her life this past year. The opening was an awakening, followed by chaos and conflict, and the final part, the one that Ellise yearned for so much, was a resolve. As Ellise recalled the music, she envisioned the double bar that signified the end of the song. She prayed in her head as the end grew nearer, "God, I threw away the match. I'm waiting for the sun now." Suddenly, as the last note projected throughout the recital hall, memories of life before the accident flooded her mind, and her gaze locked on a familiar pair of piercing blue eyes in the audience. "I love you," she mouthed from the stage.

RED MOON RISING

By: Catherine Beverly

Old Red knew a lot about hunting. She'd been around the block a few times and had the scars to prove it. There was this old one on her temple, deep and scabbed over, that always bothered her when the moon was full. Little Red was just like her. Her mom had died young in a hunting accident – got too close to a wolf, they say – so she'd been raised by her grandmother. She grew up a little too harsh and a little too thin, the product of being raised a killer. Old Red kept her out of the hunts until she'd been through 200 moon cycles, like tradition, but once that last moon cycle hit, Little Red was standing in the field with the local hunters. There was something about their eyes that made Little Red turn away and clutch her crossbow just a little tighter.

When a howl seeped from the woods, they marched forward in unison. Grandmother and granddaughter entered the forest together, tracking the sound deeper into the darkness. Old Red was used to the heavy weight of the full moon, but it pushed down on the young girl. The howl sounded again, much closer than before, and the grandmother motioned for them to get into formation. Little Red brought up the rear, her weapon at the ready, when she saw a flash of red out of the corner of her eye – an alpha.

It barreled her over, slamming her into the forest floor before she could lift her crossbow to meet it. Hot breath fanned her cheek and the red of its eyes didn't waver. The whistle of an arrow signaled her grandmother's arrival and it hit the wolf with a sickening thud. A growl shook his frame and escaped through his bloodied muzzle, but that was the only indication

that he noticed the attack. Little Red couldn't breathe with the weight of the wolf on her chest. Her eyes were slipping closed when she felt teeth rest against her neck. Old Red approached with another arrow at the ready, but the wolf swatted her away with a massive paw. When he focused back on the huntress beneath him, his eyes were a deeper crimson than before. He hefted some of his weight off of her, allowing a breath of stale air into the girl's lungs.

Before she could scream, she met the glow of his eyes and froze yet again. The next moment passed in silence before a sly smile turned up her lips and the red of his eyes bled out into hers. He took his paws off her chest completely and crouched near her unconscious grandmother. She found herself on her feet, pulling the dirty remnants of her red cloak around her shoulders before she drew closer to the wolf. His mouth widened, all teeth and saliva, and his tongue lolled out. Little Red kept her gaze on him, the sheen in the wolf's eyes still reflecting in her own. Another howl sounded in the distance, another trap for a young huntress, but the wolf ignored it. He dwarfed her when he rose to his feet and padded over to herd her into the darkness. Old Red came to hours later with a thin scar to match all the others.

SEX TRADE

By: Vera Day

I had to run. I had to get away from that horrid place before they caught me. When I got far enough away, I climbed up a tree and nestled in my holey, musty blanket. It was the last thing left of my old life. In the warmth of my blanket, I slipped into a familiar nightmare. I was in my room when I heard the front door open with a thud. Then I heard cries of "help!" coming from my parents. In complete panic, I dropped to the floor and scooted under my bed. The noises from the living room stopped and suddenly my bedroom door burst open. Two men in black ski masks entered my room and ordered me out from under my bed. I climbed out and all of a sudden I felt a sharp pain on my head and then nothing. I woke up in a car, scared and confused.

"What's going on?" I asked. I tried to sit up, but my head throbbed until I knew I had to lie back down.

A man with striking blue eyes said, "You are going to make me rich, little girl."

I struggled to understand the implications of what he said. The one thing I knew was that I needed to get away from him as soon as possible. I looked around for anything I could use in my escape. I saw a hammer lying on the floor board, and I pretended to pass out again. It wouldn't have been a hard thing to do with my head pounding like it was. I waited for the first good opportunity to get away, then I let my hand drop to the hammer in anticipation. When the man with blue eyes was busy watching traffic at the red light, I jumped up and slammed the hammer into his head, claw first. I felt his skull give way and the claw go deeper into his head I let go of the hammer, opened the car door, and jumped out as it started slowing moving forward.

I ran up the street, not paying attention to where I was going. *Away, away* was all I could think. I noticed people stopping to stare at me during my escape. I vaguely remember hearing screams behind me and seeing looks of confusion and terror as I ran by.

I slowed my pace only when my lungs felt as if they would explode. I caught my reflection in a storefront window as I passed by and was surprised to see a grown woman splattered in blood staring back at me.

I awoke with a start to the sound of people talking.

“Ms. Elizabeth, please come down. I don’t want you to get hurt,” said a man in a white uniform. “It’s warm inside. Come have a nice cup of tea. I’ll bring you to your room.”

“Do I know you?” I asked. I couldn’t remember this strange little man. I looked around, but nothing was familiar. What was I doing up in this tree?

“Of course. I’m John. I’m taking care of you. I’ve worked here for five years.”

I decided it might be best if I got down from the tree, so I grabbed my blanket and began my descent to the ground. John helped me down the last few feet.

“Well, thank you for your help. I don’t know what got into me, but everything is okay now. So, I’ll be heading home now.” I tried to walk away from the man.

“Hold on just a minute. I promised you a cup of tea. Why don’t you come in for that tea and we can visit for a spell?” asked John. I walked forward with John’s hand on the small of my back.

“Okay. Just for one cup. Maybe I can borrow a phone to call home? My family will be worried about me.”

“Sure, you can borrow a phone after your cup of tea.”

As we approached the front steps, I looked up at the building. The sign read, *Welcome to Central Psychiatric Hospital.*

I DO NOT CALL
ONE GREATER
AND ONE SMALLER,
THAT WHICH
FILLS ITS PERIOD
AND PLACE IS EQUAL
TO ANY.

ARTWORK

FINE ART



Personal Cerberus by Ethan McManus
1ST PLACE



Funny Face by Annabel Jones
2ND PLACE



Lounge About Leighanna by Ethan McManus
3RD PLACE

PHOTOGRAPHY



**Belladonna by Annabel Jones
1ST PLACE**



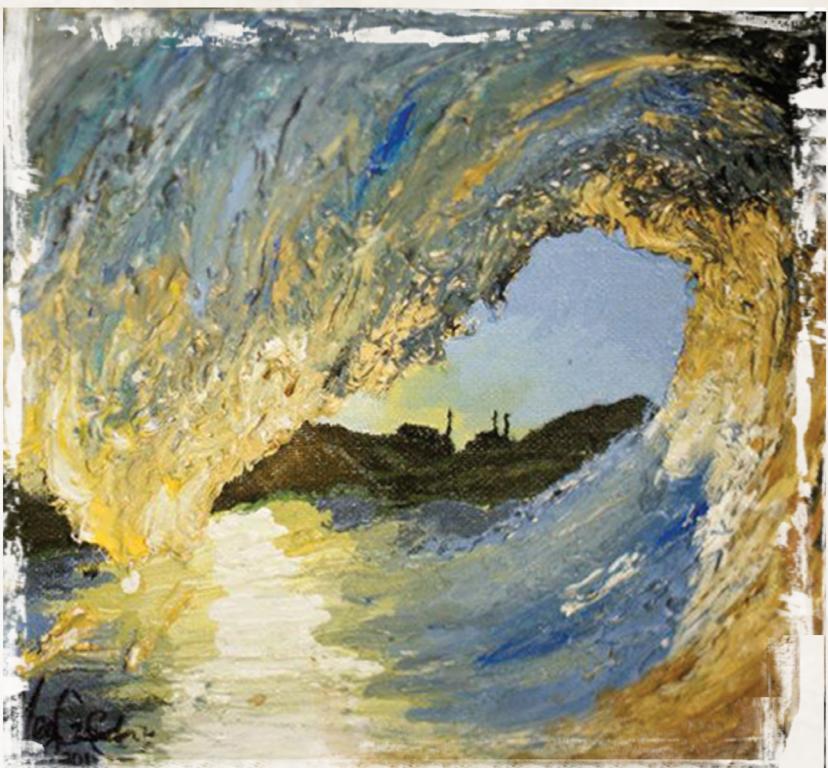
**Through the Woods by Annabel Jones
3RD PLACE**



**Dancing Bones by Derrick Notice
2ND PLACE**



Untitled by Kara Scouten



Morning Wave by Megan Guidry



Cold Fire, Warm Window by Aaron Nelms



Amber Impression by Alicia Anderson



Baby by Karissa Robertson



Just Let Go by Jacob Riojas



Tardis in Time Vortex by Alicia Anderson



Untitled 1 by Karissa Robertson



Urban Coral 1 by Ethan McManus



Truck Beneath Leaves and Rust by Aaron Nelms



Seadragon by Alicia Anderson



Untitled 2 by Karissa Robertson



Fields of Fame by Derrick Notice



Celestial Lion by Meaghan Foucheux



Forgotten Television by Aaron Nelms



The Drop by Kaylee Medine



Tweaked Bicycle Shadow by Paula Barker



The Blue Curl by Kaylee Medine



Life by Kaylee Medine



Heartless by Jacob Riojas



Pink Petals by Paula Barker

MY LOVERS
SUFFOCATE
ME, CROWDING
MY LIPS,
THICK
IN THE PORES
OF MY SKIN.

NON-FICTION

SCREENED

By: Betsy Loyed

1ST PLACE OVERALL

It's silent.

It's been silent for three days. Since the words that played across its small screen that were harsh and angry. Since I said that I couldn't stand the emptiness anymore. Since you struck out at me for not being able to survive on nothing.

Before that, it was a week of nothing. It was too much, the little you gave me, to bear. How can you give something that isn't anything? How can you give the absence of sentiment? Or the lack of concern? Somehow you managed it. The weight of nothing is more than anyone can imagine.

It's a buzz. The silence that isn't silent. I can hear it clearly, and it's loud. Never let anyone tell you that the absence of noise has no sound. You have proven that much to me. Because that silence is filled with the reminders that to you, I'm not worth five seconds. To you, I'm not worth a thought.

I press a button. Any button, and I don't press so much as I strike it with a savagery that embarrasses me, watching without wanting to watch the screen as it lights up to show me the Natchez bridge and a battery symbol that's full green. It shows me five bars beside an antenna. It shows me you don't think of me.

It makes my heart pound. Not in anger. Not in disappointment. I feel my blood race through my body and the shortness of breath that comes with the fear. The fear that I will be alone. You made it look so easy to walk in, and then right back out of my life. You've all made it look so easy.

I asked if this was what you still wanted, and you gave me a

resounding, "Yes." If you changed your mind, that's okay. If you're going to break a heart at least have the courage to do it with some class. Do it honestly. Say it. This isn't how a man handles things. This is how a child handles things.

I asked nothing from you that I wasn't giving. Thought. Care. Concern. I didn't ask for the world and all the things in it. I asked for you. I asked to be someone who meant something to you. And you can't change how you feel, but there's no need to lie about it. No need to lead a heart on. No need to cut ties without a word, without a goodbye.

Now the screen is lit, and the box says your name, but I think I don't want the goodbye. I don't need the goodbye. Maybe I've been too convenient, too involved. I answered every call, every message. I became the option, when I made you a priority.

I press a button. This time it's a specific button. The END button, and just like that you're sent to voicemail. Because I'm worth more than what you gave. I can have more than what you gave.

Silence.

It seems so much lighter without you on my mind.

The screen lights up again. The box says your name again. I slam the sliding screen down and the glass cracks. It spreads across the box and the screen goes blank. You were one of my top priorities. Now you're no longer even an option. I hope you felt that glass cracking and breaking down through your bones and into your chest. I hope you had a moment of breathlessness as you felt my concern leave you. I hope what might have been hits you like a ton of bricks when you're pressing buttons, watching without wanting to watch the screen that will show you I don't think of you.

NOW ON THIS SPOT I STAND
WITH MY ROBUST SOUL,
I KNOW I HAVE THE BEST
OF TIME AND SPACE,
AND WAS NEVER MEASURED
NEVER WILL BE
MEASURED.